

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COMMUNITY MEETING
SEPTEMBER 4, 2003
DISTRICT 3
Draft

The Board of County Commissioners of Leon County, Florida met for a Community Meeting in District 3 with Chairman Grippa presiding. Present were Commissioners Sauls, Thael, Winchester, Proctor, Rackleff and Maloy. Also present was County Attorney Herb Thiele, County Administrator Parwez Alam, Deputy Clerk Sandra C. O'Neal. The Community meeting was conducted at the Canopy Oaks Elementary School and was called to order at 6.44 p.m.

Invocation was provided by Commissioner Winchester followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Chairman Grippa requested a motion designating Commissioner Winchester as the Chairman for his District meeting for tonight.

Commissioner Thael moved, duly seconded by Commissioner Sauls and carried unanimously, 5/0 (Commissioners Proctor and Maloy were not present), to designate Commissioner Winchester as Chairman of the District 3 meeting.

Commissioner Winchester announced that children's books were on display at the check-in table and showed one as an example of the books available at the Lake Jackson Branch Library.

The following speakers appeared:

Sara Johnson, citizen, appeared and explained that she spearheaded the drive in support of building a new Lake Jackson Library. She provided information on the present use of the Library and its inadequacy space to accommodate the children's READ Program, computers, reading space, and other space needs.

The following speakers appeared and voiced support for a new Library branch in the northwest area: Linda McArthur, 2716 Brenner Pass; Shirley Taylor, 2660 Nex Perce Trail; Chris Walker, 2640 Onyx Trail; Amy Vasquez, 5537 Denargo Drive; Sonya Chapman, 4526 Running Meadows; Sara Micheals, 2111 Lale Forest; Mark Goldman, 3584 Woodhill Drive; Denise Winchester, 1204 Firethorne.

Status on Canopy Oaks Park

Josh McSwain, Parks & Recreation, gave an update on the park and its completion date.

Status on the Harbinwood Drainage Project

Theresa Hieker, Public Works Stormwater Engineer, explained that 20 sites are needed for the project; the County has acquired six sites and four were paid for with federal money, and one homeowner declined.

Status Reports

Update on the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA)

1. Update on the Community Redevelopment Area

Vince Long, Assistant County Administrator, explained the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). The City is proposing to make Tallahassee a downtown CRA; a CRA is essentially a geographically defined area that is targeted for economic development and it redevelops slum and blighted areas. By establishing a CRA, the City automatically can do certain things statutorily that they cannot do without a CRA. Mr. Long explained that the CRA will result in a major cost to taxpayers - approximately \$80 million over the next 20 years and the City has a few approval steps remaining. If the CRA is approved, it will have expounded powers of eminent domain (condemn private property) and will be able to exercise TIF (tax increment financing), which is a redirection of County property taxes to the City's Trust Fund and is for the exclusive use of projects inside the City limits. Mr. Long explained that County approval is not needed for the proposed downtown CRA and he raised the question: Does the downtown deserve the County's attention and if so, is a CRA the appropriate tool?

Mr. Long explained that normally CRA's are formed with the City and the County working together and both decide if a CRA should be pursued. He noted that it is important that citizens realize that the City claims that they are not creating a new CRA but are expanding the existing Frenchtown CRA to include downtown; it is a loophole that exists and is not an argument that the County accepts. The County will not be able to absorb the \$80 million and two things could occur - either reduce County services or raise County millage rates.

Mr. Long urged citizens to contact the City Commissioners regarding the CRA and announced that the County Commission has a joint meeting scheduled with the City Commission for a Conflict Resolution Meeting for September 15, 2003 at 3:00 p.m. at City Hall to address this issue.

2. Update on Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Vince Long, Assistant County Administrator, explained that in September 2002 Tallahassee Memorial Hospital announced that they could no longer continue to provide emergency medical services and Life Flight due to financial hardship of the hospital. In the spring of 2003, County/City staff worked with consultants on an appropriate EMS model for the community. In July 2003, after unsuccessful negotiations with the City, the County voted to implement a County-run EMS Department. The County system will be activated on January 1, 2004.

Mr. Long further explained that the County will continue to provide the highest level of care to the community and there will be an increased emphasis on training EMS professionals and on ALS (advanced life support) arriving on the scene faster and training for first responders. Air Ambulance Emergency Medical and Transport Services were secured in July 2003 at no cost to the County and Air methods "LifeNet" service will be operating locally and stationed at the Tallahassee airport.

The funding source for EMS was explained to citizens. A Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) in the amount of 0.5 mill will be imposed for the first year of service and plans to be reduced to 0.2 mill in the out years.

Commissioner Thael stated that the upcoming budget, beginning October 1, 2003, would include \$875,000 for two branch libraries, District 3 and District 5, which totals \$1.75 million. He stated that he supports libraries but he would recommend to not build the branch libraries this year and defer the construction for one or two years; the money could be used for Capital costs for the EMS such as purchasing ambulances, etc., which would completely eliminate the MSTU tax next year for Emergency Management Services.

3. **Overview of the Fiscal Year 2003/2004 Operating and Capital Improvement Budget**

Alan Rosenzweig, Director of Office of Management and Budget (OMB), referred to the blue handout and the overhead screen, which explains the budget overview. This is the first budget prepared since the citizens approved the Home Rule Charter County (November 2002). The long-term lasting impact is that the County will be able to eliminate the Fire Services MSTU and the Water/Sewer Franchise Fee and replace it with the more equitable Public Services Tax, which is charged to all users of utilities. Also, by use of the Communications Service Tax (CST), the Board was able to commit money to the flooded property acquisition program

The Board also enacted the Senior Homestead Exemption a couple of years ago and approximately 1,900 seniors have qualified for the exemption which saved senior taxpayers \$414,000.

Mr. Rosenzweig explained that the majority of budgeted money (32%) goes to Public Safety (i.e. Sheriff, EMS, Fire Services) and is summarized in the blue handout, which also compares budgets of other counties of comparable size. He reported that Leon County has the smallest budget and the lowest spending per capita than other counties that provide a high level of service. Leon County has the second highest percentage of exempt property in the state due to State government and universities which are exempt (43% of property in Leon County is off the tax rolls).

Mr. Rosenzweig highlighted some Capital Projects planned and budgeted for District 3: Identify a Lake Jackson Branch Library; Jackson View Park Enhancements; identify a site for the Lake Jackson Community Center; the Harbinwood Estates Drainage Project; and installing turn lane on North Monroe Street.

Commissioner Winchester informed the citizens about the situation regarding pollution from Georgia, into the Ochlockonee River. He also spoke about the proposed plans for the construction of a landfill on the Georgia-Florida border and the proposed Tired Creek Reservoir.

Citizens to Be Heard

Sonya Chapman, 452 Running Meadows Lane, appeared and spoke on the traffic capacity on Old Bainbridge Road.

Discussion Items by Commissioners

Chairman Grippa encouraged citizens to learn about the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) and to contact City Commissioners.

Commissioner Winchester explained that the FYU 2003-2004 budget will be voted on this month and it will include the budget for the branch libraries. He urged citizens to contact Commissioners and specify their wishes as it relates to libraries.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

APPROVED: _____
Tony Grippa
Chairman

ATTEST:

Bob Inzer
Clerk of the Circuit Court